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ABSTRACT

This report provides data on the number of years doctoral students take to complete their degrees. Between 1970 and 1993, total time-to-degree (the number of years between the baccalaureate and doctoral degrees) increased from a median of 7.9 years to 11.2 years. Students who majored in the natural sciences or in computer sciences and engineering took less time on average to complete their doctoral degrees than students who majored in education and other technical/professional fields. Registered time-to-degree (the number of years actually enrolled in graduate study) increased slightly between 1970 and 1993, and showed less variability across fields of study and between males and females that total time-to-degree. Students whose primary source of financial support was personal resources had the longest time between completing their bachelor's and doctoral degrees, whereas students with federal research assistantships had the shortest. (MDM)

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INDICATOR OF THE MONTH

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

February 1996

Time to complete a doctorate degree, by field of study

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

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Time to complete a doctorate degree, by field of study

Trends in the number of years doctoral students take to complete their degrees suggest changes in the time needed to produce doctorate-level personnel. These trends also may provide clues to other important changes, such as in students' financial resources and amount of part-time study. Total time-to-degree (TTD) measures the number of years between completion of the baccalaureate and doctorate degrees, including nonenrolled as well as enrolled time. Registered time-to-degree (RTD), however, only measures the number of years enrolled, full time or part time, in graduate school.

- **Between 1970 and 1993, total time-to-degree among doctoral students increased for all fields of study, with the largest increase in years occurring in the education and other technical/ professional fields.**
- **Time-to-degree varied by field of study throughout the 1970–93 time period. Students who majored in the natural sciences or in computer sciences and engineering took less time on average to complete their doctorates, whereas students who majored in education or other technical/professional fields generally took longer.**
- **Registered time-to-degree increased slightly between 1970 and 1993, and showed less variability across fields of study and between males and females than total time-to-degree.**
- **While overall females tend to take longer to complete their doctorates, within the same fields of study, male and female total time-to-degree is similar except in the education and other technical/professional fields.**
- **Total time-to-degree differs for students with various types of primary sources of financial support in graduate school. Students whose primary source of support was personal resources had the longest time between completing their bachelor's and doctor's degrees, whereas students with federal research assistantships had the shortest. Types of primary financial support were less related to registered time-to-degree.**

Median total time-to-degree for doctorate degrees among U.S. citizens and permanent U.S. residents, by sex and field of study: Selected years of doctorate 1970–93

Year of doctorate	Total	Sex		Field of study					
		Male	Female	Humanities	Social and behavioral sciences	Natural sciences	Computer sciences and engineering	Education	Other technical/ professional*
				Total time-to-degree (TTD, in median years)					
1970	7.9	7.6	9.7	9.2	7.6	6.1	6.9	12.7	8.5
1972	8.2	8.0	9.8	9.2	7.7	6.5	7.6	12.6	8.6
1974	8.6	8.4	9.5	9.4	8.0	6.8	7.9	12.5	8.9
1976	8.8	8.5	9.8	9.7	8.1	6.8	7.8	12.8	9.5
1978	9.0	8.6	10.2	10.1	8.3	6.9	7.8	12.8	9.6
1980	9.4	8.8	10.6	10.7	8.8	6.8	7.7	13.3	9.8
1982	9.7	9.0	11.1	11.2	9.4	6.9	7.9	13.9	10.2
1984	10.3	9.4	11.8	11.5	9.9	7.3	7.9	14.9	10.9
1986	10.7	9.8	12.4	12.2	10.2	7.4	7.9	16.0	11.8
1988	10.9	10.0	12.7	12.4	10.8	7.5	8.0	17.2	12.4
1990	11.3	10.0	13.3	12.4	10.9	7.6	8.2	18.3	12.9
1991	11.3	10.1	13.3	12.6	10.9	7.6	8.3	18.8	13.6
1992	11.3	10.2	13.3	12.3	11.0	7.8	8.4	19.3	13.8
1993	11.2	10.2	13.2	12.2	10.8	7.8	8.7	19.7	14.0

* Principally composed of agricultural sciences, business and management, communications, health sciences, and other occupationally oriented fields.

SOURCE: National Research Council, Survey of Earned Doctorates, Doctorate Records File, various years.

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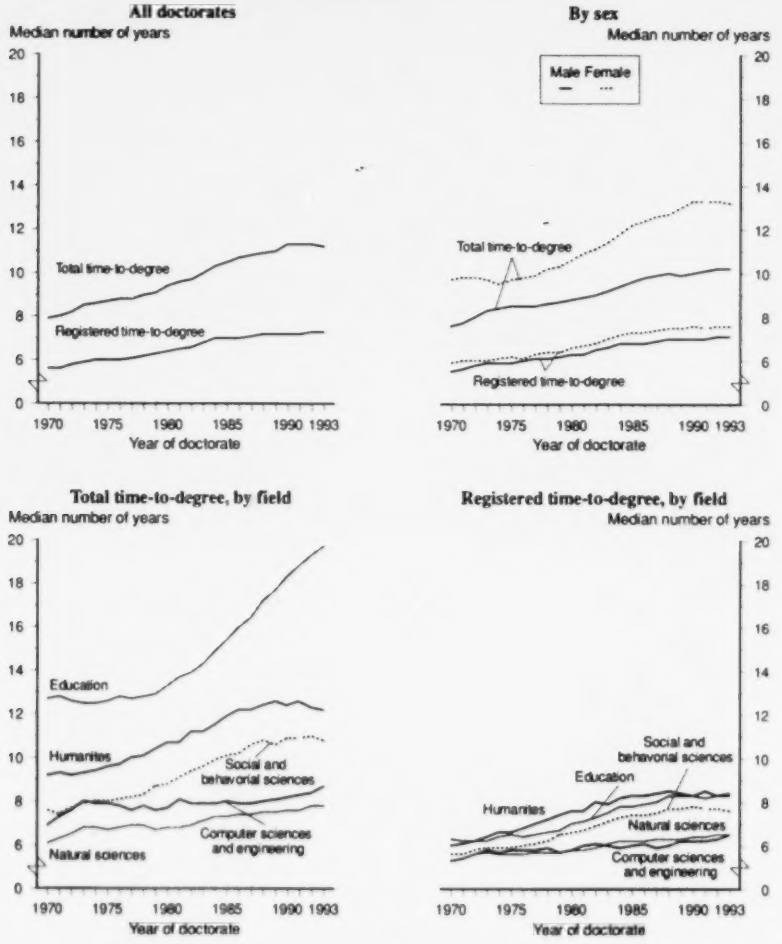
Median total time-to-degree and registered time-to-degree for doctorate degrees among U.S. citizens and permanent U.S. residents, by field of study: Years of doctorate 1970–93



SOURCE: National Research Council, Survey of Earned Doctorates, Doctorate Records File, various years.

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